DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 233 543 EC 160 071

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TITLE Vocational Options for Deaf-Blind Youth Through Community-Based Training. Project ADVANCE.
PUB DATE May 83
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association on Mental Deficiency (107th, Dallas, TX, May 29-June 2, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Community Resources; *Deaf Blind; *Employment; *Job Skills; Program Descriptions; Sheltered Workshops; *Vocational Education; Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *Project ADVANCE

ABSTRACT

Project ADVANCE currently provides vocational training to 26 deaf-blind adolescents and young adults attending Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts. The project has developed community work sites in four different vocational options: (1) competitive employment, (2) a student operated small business, (3) sheltered enclave within industry, and (4) sheltered employment. Students progress from instruction in job tasks and work behavior to a gradual phasing out of the teacher's supervisory role with employers assuming the supervision. Competitive positions include food preparers, bakers' assistants, and laundry workers. The student operated business provides janitorial services, while the sheltered enclave within industry is an industrial bakery. The sheltered employment setting is a workshop/work activity program in which students participate for 4-8 hours per week. The project emphasizes such necessary student work behaviors as problem solving and conflict resolution, while also helping employees and employers deal with the deaf-blind person. (CL)

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ED233543

Vocational Options for Deaf-Blind Youth Through Community-Based Training

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association on Mental Deficiency, 107th, Dallas, Texas May 29-June 2, 1983

Since 1980 Project ADVANCE, a federally funded innovative vocational model project, has been providing vocational training to a group of deaf-blind adolescents at the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts. The majority of the students involved in the project are in their late teens or early twenties; many are the victims of the rubella epidemic of the mid-sixties. Perkins has provided educational services to some of these students since they were very young children. While the children grew up physically, their parents, teachers and advocates matured politically and phisosophically. The impact of state and federal laws mandating free and appropriate education for all, and that of the philosphical concept of normalization, have dramatically altered our thinking. Our expectations of what these students will do vocationally as adults have undergone concurrent changes. Since funding for educational services will end for all of the Project ADVANCE students within five years, our purpose in developing the model was to provide some insight into a variety of job possibilities that could be made available to them as they leave the educational setting.

Recent studies done by Gold (1980), Bellamy (1980), Brown (1978) and Wehman (1980) have shown success in training mentally retarded adults to perform complex job tasks and to work competitively within industry. Our experience with these deaf-blind students has proved to us that they are capable of learning a great deal. Generalizing what they have learned across a variety of settings was a problem for some. The major obstacle the students faced in developing appropriate work behaviors and attitudes, however, was that the training was occurring outside of the real work setting. The performance expectations for the students were those of the teacher, not of the employer. Consequently, Project ADVANCE opted to develop a variety of community-based training sites.

Currently Project ADVANCE is serving twenty-six deaf-blind adolescents in fifteen different work sites. These work sites can be loosely categorized into four different vocational options: competitive; student operated small business; sheltered enclave within industry; and sheltered employment. Within each option the skill level and degree of independence required vary greatly but, in general terms, the more competitive the option, the more demanding the requirements.

Project ADVANCE training has three phases. The initial phase involves active training on job tasks and work behaviors, and helping the student set up functional relationships with the people in the work place. During this time the teacher is on site working with the student and co-workers. The intermediate phase requires that the teacher become less directly involved with the student but be available to intervene and assist in problem situations. A major focus of this phase is transferring supervisory responsibilities from the teacher to the employer/supervisor. In the final phase the teacher's main function is to provide follow-up and assist the employer, co-workers and students to work through problems at the work site. Periodically, employers have requested that teachers return to help them train the students on a new job.

Sixty-five percent (18/26) of the project students receive vocational training in a competitive setting. In this option, after training period the student works independently at the work site. Daily supervision is primarily the responsibility of the employer. Students work part-time (3-15 hrs. a week) performing the job responsibilities listed on the chart titled Competitive Jobs.

Competitive Jobs

Students work part-time (3-15 hrs. a week) performing the job responsibilities of the following:

Job Title	Type of Business
Food Preparer*+	Soup & Salad Restaurant
Service Personnel*+	Fast Food Restaurant
Greenhouse Laborer	Cemetery Greenhouse
Coin Teller/Filer Clerk*+	Savings Bank
Food Preparer	Restaurant
Laundry Worker	Restaurant
Baker's Assistant	Industrial Bakery
Baker's Assistant	Large Hotel
Dishwasher*+	Racquetball Club
Locker Room Maintenance Worker*+	Racquetball Club
Laundry Worker*	Commercial Laundry
Food Preparer	Catering Service

In some settings the students earn minimum wage (*) or more (+), while in other businesses the students qualify for Special Worker's Certification. Their wages are based on their own production, and take into account their versatility and any necessary modifications in job responsibilities they may require.

The student operated business is based on the principles behind Minnesota Diversified Industries and other industries for the handicapped. It provides janitorial services, i.e., cleaning hallways and staircases of apartment buildings and picking up litter and debris on sidewalks. The students are supervised by project staff and perform many aspects of the job independently. The teacher provides quality control and supervises high risk situations, i.e., collecting litter in heavy traffic areas. Some of the students assist in ordering supplies, managing student payroll and billing. The six students who are employed in this business (2 hrs. a week) earn minimum wage.

One work placement, an industrial bakery, qualifies as a sheltered enclave within industry. Five students are employed as production assistants. Although they perform fewer job functions than other employees with the same job title, the students work in the same production area. They are always primarily supervised by project staff. These students qualify for Special Worker's certification and earn fifty percent of minimum wage.

Lastly, seven project students work in three area sheltered workshop/work activity programs (4-8 hrs. a week). After the initial training period students work independently at the work site and supervision is primarily the responsibility of the workshop staff. Students are paid at piece rate.

In many instances students work at more than one job and get experience in different vocational options. It is a temptation to say simply that the most capable students (by educational standards) are the most successful in competitive settings. However, there are too many expectations to validate that concept. In some cases the required skills and level of independent functioning necessary to succeed in a competitive job setting are less stringent than

those required in a more sheltered setting. For example, the job of food preparer in the catering service meets the criteria for a competitive placement. However, that business is very small and the student is required to work with only one other person. Demands for rapid production and good intrapersonal skills are minimal. In fact, there is less pressure in this site than in one of the sheltered workshop settings.

Success as a student does not assure success as an employee. Employers state clearly that people most often lose jobs not because they lack skills but rather because they have poor work behaviors and attitudes. Since most of the jobs we have accessed are entry level, unskilled or semi-skilled positions, the students have learned the job tasks rapidly. Generally, instructors train the students on site in specific skills, i.e., to operate the industrial dishwasher or to cut lemons. Tasks are broken down into small steps to facilitate instruction. The real focus of the training is on communication, problem solving, resolving donflicts and learning to be flexible. Project ADVANCE teachers work with co-workers and employers on these issues almost as much as with the students. For both groups the real key to success is in learning to deal with each other.

For co-workers and employers the initial training period can be uncomfortable. Establishing effective methods of communicating with the students is a major hurdle to be overcome in alleviating the awkwardness. The form that communication takes is highly individualized. Note writing, manual alphabet, sign language, adaptive hearing aids, gestures and writing in the palm are some of the methods used.

Treating the students in the same manner that other employees are treated is an issue for some employers. Too often, they hesitate to criticize the student or report problems to the teachers until the problems have become so great that the student's job is in jeopardy. For example, a student working as a coin teller in a savings bank was told to punch out early since it was slow and his work was completed. Instead, so that he wouldn't lose pay, he waited in the employees' lounge until his regular check out time. His supervisor was so careful not to hurt his feelings that her reprimand had no impact and the student repeated the behavior. This made him appear insubordinate to his supervisor and co-workers. When project staff assured the supervisor that the student could handle being reprimanded firmly and worked with the student so that he realized his actions were a problem, the behavior finally changed.

At the onset of the project, staff anticipated seeing students demonstrate a variety of dramatic interfering behavior, i.e., tantrums, self stimulation, extraneous noises, etc. Actually the problems at the work place were much more subtle. For example, one student would enter the work area and begin working without greeting her co-workers, causing them to see her as an unfriendly, aloof person. This negative perception of the student hindered her ability to establish good, comfortable methods of communicating with her co-workers. Teaching her to wave and smile as she entered work helped make her co-workers much more receptive to her.

Another student, working as a dishwasher in a racquetball club, consistently yelled and waved his arms to attract his supervisor's attention. He fully expected her to come across the club to him. His method was not appreciated by either his supervisor or his co-workers. Learning appropriate ways to interact with various people at the work site is often as critical a skill for these students as learning job tasks.

During the course of the project students have also developed positive perceptions of themselves as capable, productive wage earners. In fact, most of the people who interact with them at school, work and at home view them less as simply "students." They are rapdily approaching adulthood, and there are viable vocational alternatives that should be made available to them. A small percentage could be employed competitively if appropriately trained on the job. The majority of these students will continue to need some support after the age of twenty-two if they need to locate a new job or require re-training. Transportation will always be a problem and the solutions will have to be very individualized.

The majority of the deaf-blind students will need a more sheltered option. Sheltered workshops may be appropriate for some, but certain competitive jobs, client-run businesses and sheltered enclaves within industry are also possible work options. Through our experiences within Project ADVANCE we've learned a great deal about vocational training. The larger task is to assure that these options are available to deaf-blind adults.

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